

THE MIDLAND

VOLUME TEN

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By JOHN T. FREDERICK

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NO. 1

THE LOADING

By RAYMOND KNISTER

I

Jesse Culworth's air that morning announced that he did not even wish to seem tranquil. His wife, sensitive, as always, to his temper, felt that. So did Garland, his son. When he came in at half-past six from the before-breakfast chores he glowered silently half-sitting, half-leaning with folded arms against the sewing machine, toward the boy, who was washing at the kitchen sink. "Come, Ma," he said to his wife, "dish the porridge up! We're just ready."

When he had washed they sat down. The room was dimly lit by vine-covered windows. Sunbeams made numerous rays through the leaves of virginia creeper, targeting at bright spots on the fading dark paper of the opposite wall. The table at which they sat seemed to half-fill the kitchen. Jesse, strong-looking and unbent of shoulders at forty, ate his oatmeal with melancholy gusto, at times heavily regarding his wife at the other end of the table. He held out his cup and saucer in silence for more tea. As Nettie filled the cup he said, "Whoa!", his use of the accustomed word so abrupt and morose that, startled, his wife passed the cup back. He drank the tea slowly. On his regular thick features a slight moisture could be seen in the dim light of the warm kitchen.

"Going to take them hogs in to town this morning," he

announced to his son as he leaned back in his chair after finishing the tea. "Old Gus told me last night he guessed he'd take 'em."

The good humors of Jesse rather preceded than followed his visits to town. He would see Charlie Alten, or some others of his early friends driving about the village in their motors after the closing of their stores. Always after greeting one of them he would bite his lip and mutter to himself, drawing back his shoulders, "What a fool I was, what a fool! They didn't have any more schooling than I did. To go out on that blasted unearthly farm!" His mother who was living in the village after the death of her husband persuaded him into taking a farm as soon as he had finished high-school. She was intolerably afraid that he would not "settle down", for until his death her husband had not. Jesse stuck to the farm during good years because they might continue, and he wouldn't quit in a poor year because then it and the stock could not be sold for what they were worth. Of late the years seemed mostly alike. The details of his ill-luck became to him of less and less interest except as a subject for objurgation. To heavy rains and droughts he resigned himself almost with enjoyment. If anyone's clover failed to "catch", it was his; if anyone's wheat winter-killed, his did. Hoof and mouth disease broke out miles away to head straight to his stable.

"I should guess he would take 'em, the price he's paying now!" Culworth grunted, looking to his wife for approval of the wit.

There was silence. Like most men he had made a phrase of his own, which he liked to use. His was, "the devilishness of things in general". He took pleasure in using it in the presence of his wife. Aside from her feeling of a discomfortable approach to blasphemy Nettie Culworth did not like such words to be said before her son. Now Jesse eschewed it in a feeling of deprivation.

Yet he came down hard on the boy if inadvertently he used any of such gross terms as naturally he would pick up. Jesse seemed to think that no one else was justified in such behavior.

Without speaking Garland finished his glass of milk and rose. Lifting his chair back from the table he set it against the wall.

"Load 'em in the wagon, eh?" he asked.

"Yes, but the darn horses haven't come up from the bush yet. You'll have to go after them. They'll stay all day."

"It's too bad they can't learn to come up in the mornings," said Nettie, looking at her fifteen-year-old son. "It's a long walk back there."

The boy had taken his broad curling hat from the nail. "Oh, I don't mind it," he mumbled as he let the screen-door swing to behind him.

II

It was the beginning of a June day, warm yet fresh. The young boy walked down the rail-fenced lane to the back of the farm; and the surrounding grass and corn, the weeds in the fence-corners, the inadvertent sounding of insects, a bird alighting on a top rail, the mist hanging in the middle distance and opening a horizon about him as he went, made a whole which was more to him than the vague thoughts which came to his mind. He was at peace. He kept steadily on his way toward the bush, still a wide hidden shape before him in the morning.

The bush was beautiful in its attempted negation of color, its fragrance and a kind of reserve of warmth. The trees stood dozing, or whispering a little softly so as not to rouse the others. Near the front of the lot, where they were fewer, some of them had always had each a character of its own for Garland. One, he could not tell why, reminded him of an old calm church elder as he

stood outside the church after service and greeted the people, his long beard moving. Another one was like a statue of a lion. It was strong-rooted and gnarled. Another was some slender fleet animal, he knew not what, and he wondered, before pausing in the wake of phantasies of his earlier childhood, why it had not sprung away and left the bush since he had been there last.

The boy began calling through the thin woods as he walked. He was at a loss in what direction to go that he might find the horses. He began to walk around the edge of the bush within a few rods of the line fence. The echo of his voice seemed muffled distantly, and to come back about him through the trees and the mist. The near trees became columns upholding clouds as he moved toward them. He had made almost a complete circuit when he decided to strike in to the centre of the wood and to finish examination of the outskirts if necessary afterward.

Now uneasiness came to him, as he thought of his father's waiting, and he walked more quickly.

III

Jesse was growing more and more impatient as the time passed. When he had fed the hogs generously he greased the wagon and put the sides on the rack which was used to haul livestock to market. He could have found plenty of odd jobs for an hour yet, but he did not think of them in his increasing disquiet. He would go to the head of the lane and look down it for the string of horses which should be coming. "Blame the boy, what's aillin' him?" he muttered. The sun was beginning to shine out warmly, and to Jesse as he came forth from pitching down hay for noon from the loft to the stable below it seemed as though the morning were half gone. His annoyance was not lessened when he considered that

probably he might not with a show of justice reproach the boy.

He went to the house. After he had taken a drink of water, he breathed heavily, glanced at himself in the mirror above the sink, and stood over the bare cleared wooden table a moment, his hands on each side of yesterday's paper.

Nettie Culworth came from the pantry to look into the oven.

"I wonder what on earth can be keeping that boy! There's no get-up about him. He's been gone for hours. Lot of help he is!" The back of his hand bristled across his mouth.

"He's likely doing the best he can, Jesse," his wife replied, not pausing in her work. "Don't scold him when he comes up. It's a long way back there."

He grunted as he started up from the table and the screen-door cracked to behind him, but made no answer in words. A little relieved by this passage he strode to the corner of the barn. The horses were coming up the lane, old Dan leading them, and Garland behind. Impatiently the father waited.

"Well, you've been long enough!" he called as they came nearer. "You had to run them all over the bush before you could get hold of them, eh?" He was smiling.

"No I couldn't find them, father."

"Oh! — Well, round 'em up there, hurry up, don't be all day." He slid the door open and stood back at one side of it.

But the other horses were not inclined to follow old Dan into the stable. They swerved away from Jesse and around the small strawstack in the middle of the barnyard.

"Git after them!" he called to his son. *Be quick!* Bring them around the stack and I'll watch here."

The boy was already gone, and there was a moment of

rustling through the straw and a dry musty smell, then the horses came tearing and plunging from around the stack. Jesse shouted and waved his arms, but he had nothing in his hands to frighten them back. They passed him and went down the lane. Garland leaped the fence and headed them off there, while Jesse strode to the stable door. "Show 'em next time," he muttered, gripping a fork-handle firmly. His impatience, or whatever it was, was augmented by the failure to stay the horses in the presence of his son.

This time one of the horses, head and tail up, came alone from behind the stack. The man ran forward to steer it into the door, but it darted away, leaving him beside the wall when a second one came toward him. He ran swiftly to the gate, growling between his clenched teeth, "Who-oah, *you!*" He thought for an instant he had it, but it was passing him. He unconsciously swerved a little when he saw that they were going through the gate together and did not see protruding at an angle from the post a stiff wire, which grazed his cheek. He stopped and held one hand to his face intently a moment, not looking around, then with set jaw and without a word twisted the wire violently until it was broken off.

Garland looked on at this a moment, then remembered the horses, and went to drive them up a third time. The animals appeared to realize that their mischief had gone far enough for that morning, and came around quietly.

Jesse and his son entered the stable in silence. The boy was making for the box containing the curry-combs and brushes, when he saw that his father took down a collar from the peg. He also lifted down a collar and began to unbuckle its top. Jesse went to a stall.

"Get over here!" he said.

The animal seemed to hesitate, and did not move, so he quietly laid the collar down and bracing his powerful frame against the planks pushed the back part of the

horse violently against the opposite wall. Then he seized and held it by the halter and began to kick its stomach. "Show — you!" he grunted between the blows. After that he put on the collar.

Garland stood looking on, pale, for a few seconds, then he entered the stall of the other horse. When he had buckled the collar about its neck his father was waiting with its harness, instead of that of the horse which he had just been abusing. The animal started, knocking its knees in a tattoo against the manger, as he flung upon it the heavy harness which hung down over it behind. Jesse lifted the harness again, and came farther forward in the stall before again flinging it on the horse's back.

"What's the matter with *you*?" he asked tensely, seizing its halter and backing it in order to get at the hames. "You won't eh?" he continued as the horse made a convulsive movement forward, and struck it on the side of the muzzle.

"Father!" cried Garland.

"What's ailin' you?" asked Jesse, looking at his son for a second.

The latter said nothing, but looked shamefacedly away toward the strong glare of sunlight on the rhomboid of dirty stained cement within the door, which made the rest of the interior of the stable still more dim. Outside the sun shone fiercely on the ragged edge of the tarnished strawstack and made each straw where a forkful had been freshly taken look like a precious bit of gold. A dry stifling smell came from the hot barnyard.

"What d'you have to start them running around the stack for then? You knew too well! Or else you'll never learn." The unshaven face was yellow-black in the dim light as the man wrenched the straps into place. "What are you standing there for?" he exclaimed, raising his voice. "Haven't you lost enough time yet, eh?"

The boy reached up to the pegs, standing on his toes,

and with an effort swung a heavy harness down from them. It was dankly coated with greasy sweat. Holding the front of it in his hands he moved toward the stall. Jesse came and seizing the rear of the harness swung it to the horse's back. The animal pranced and nearly trampled the boy's feet.

"What d'you got to drag it over the floor for? If you can't pick it up, leave it alone."

They went out into the heat of the sun a short distance along the dry lane to the pig yard. The enclosure was meant for a paddock but was long since beaten to a dust by the little hoofs, and only straggling unpalatable weeds stood yet, gray with dust. It was necessary to get the hogs into the pen in order to load them. Finally after a protracted hot struggle this end was accomplished. Each one demanded individual cornering and persuasion, but the last one of all required them after a few minutes' chasing to capture him. Seizing his short hind legs they dragged him raucously complaining to the pen.

When the door was closed on him and his comrades rallying around to welcome with excited gruntings his escape, Jesse had begun to accede to a grim good-humor. He had shown them! And Garland had employed quickness and a good deal of wiry strength.

"You'll make a farmer yet," he said, as though unbendingly. He took off his hat and rubbed his brow with a colored handkerchief. Then he thought of the scratch from the wire which unaccountably he had forgotten. "I'll go put something on my face," he added, glancing at Garland. "You hitch up on the wagon and we'll go over to Crampton's for their chute." He went to the house hastily.

IV

Coming home the boy remarked, referring to the neighbor whom they had just left, "So Andrew is going to

retire?" though Crampton had just been informing them of his intention.

"Yes, the old sucker. After being as stingy as sin all his life and drudging night and day all his life like a slave he can go to town now to die of bein' afraid he'll last longer than his money will, and wanting to work out on some farm, even somebody's else, since he's left his own; and being ashamed to."

Without enthusiasm the old man had made his announcement, but he had thought the consummation worthy of a pride which he did not care to show, it was clear. His son, who was to have the running of the farm thenceforth, was not so well able to conceal his feeling. Turning aside from them talking together in the stable to hide his uncontrollable grin, he had shouted gruffly at a horse, putting back into its manger some hay which it had turned out.

Garland was silent as he looked absently at the surrounding fields, ashen and green rectangles in the violent sunlight. He sat on the low rear ladder of the wagon, and the irregular cackling rattle of the wheels lulled him. A lazy bit of dust hung alongside the wagon as they drove. The long road was empty, and seemed to hold, more than the farmyard they had just left, the hush and warmth of noon.

"Never be a farmer," said Jesse, brooding. "It's one thing or another. Either you have a heavy crop and everybody else has the same, and you take what they give you for it, or else, if the price is decent you've got but little or none. And it's always work, work, — more work than if you did have a good crop. We'll have to go into business, you and I. Hardware business out West, eh? If I'm ever able to get shut of this farm," he added with an intonation of bitterness. He brought this out as though it had long since been formed in his mind.

"Maybe we'll find a buyer," said Garland. Lolling

against the rear ladder he was again in the green woods of the morning, peering through the soft air cobwebbed with mist for the shapes of the horses showing through it vaguely in the depths. His calls rang on the thick air, but farther in the wood echoes were muffled, somehow. The horses made no movement or sound in answer, but did not try to escape when he came up to them. Dan raised a sleepy eye as he heard him coming. "You old rascal!" Garland said when he had caught hold of his forelock. "You brought them here, you know you did." The wise old boy shook the end of his long nose from side to side and snored. They all blinked at him lazy-eyed, enjoying their truancy, but not then interested enough to attempt to make a get-away. Slowly they twined out of the bush and up the long lane. For a distance he held Dan by the damp forelock of his lowered head, old Mack and the others following. But when they came to the foot of the lane Garland slipped back behind them all, so that his father might not scold him for taking the risk of their getting away from him; and followed whistling in the sun and the light rolling waves of fog past large maples and oaks that overhung the lane. Broad circles of ground beneath the trees were beaten to a finer dust by the hoofs of the horses and cattle. Even then the mist was spreading and thinning. There was promise of a very warm day. . . .

"I want you to be something better than a farmer," his father was saying impressively.

"Oh, I don't know," Garland answered uncertainly.

"Get along, Dan!" shouted Jesse, slashing with the lines.

They rattled on a few hundred yards and came to the home gate. They swung out widely to enter it. Garland suddenly cried out, and his father turning saw the heavy chute which protruded from the rack about to strike the gate-post and slide back, crushing the boy's legs. He

pulled and shouted at the horses, and at that instant gate-post and chute caught, but slightly, and the structure was moved only a few inches back from its place.

The boy's face was pink and sheepish, but his father was pale. "Well, what *are* you thinking of this morning?" he shouted as the wagon went down the lane. "Will you never learn? How often have I told you to look out for things like that? You could see blame well what was coming. But I've got to watch you like a baby. Ever *see* such a boy! I haven't enough to do, I must always be turning around and watching him. I'll have to have his mother out to help me take care of him. A great lot of good — ! Whoa!"

They drove into the bare yard and reached the pig pen. Jesse jumped down indignant. Garland continued to stand shamefaced by the back ladder of the wagon. How had he come to make such a blunder? It was true that his father had frequently warned him about such things. He must have been asleep. Still, he might have been able to jump off the back of the wagon if the chute had come any farther toward him, if the wagon were not going too rapidly. Well, another time —

He was roused by hearing his father say, "Well, are you going to help me take this thing off, or aren't you?"

At that he stepped quickly forward and began lifting the heavy bulk. Slowly it was twisted back and forth and eased to the ground. Then he jumped down and helped to drag it into place inside the door of the pen.

"Go get some chunks to block the wheels — the damn horses won't stand, I know — while I back the wagon into position."

Garland went away to a pile of rubbish outside the barnyard fence. He was in a sort of daze of which he was scarcely half aware. He kept thinking of his first morning glimpse and first whiff of the sweet and gauzy-aired day from the little open window of his bedroom; of

his mother's cheerful greeting, and the strange sadness he had felt at his father's early ill-temper; again, of the beauty of the morning bush, and sense of a myriad mist-thrilled birds when one of them broke silence for an instant, for a note. Inappositely he began thinking of evenings when he rode down the lane home on the disks musically tinkling, grating or clanging over the stones as the hungry and tired horses made for the barn; of the wonderful pleasure it now seemed to come in at dusk to the warm supper in the little bright-windowed house. The wind would rustle the vine dryly against the clapboards and the panes, but he would be warm and replete and in the light. . . . Poor Mother! Poor Dan, the old slave! Unaccountable pity for everyone and everything enwrapped him.

In that instant he was fumbling about among old sticks and rubbish and pieces of rusty fence-wire for the blocks of wood. A call from his father roused him and he started up to come bringing them. He saw over in the green wheat field a horse with its head down. "It's old Mack," he thought. "We couldn't have tied him up with the others. . . . But how did he get there, how will we catch him?"

The rear of the wagon was about three feet from the building. "I haven't got it just in position," said Jesse. "I thought it was no use until you brought the blocks, they fidget so."

He went forward, and Garland, taking no account of his movements, went in behind the wagon and looked down the slope of the chute at the pigs. He leaned over the straight lip of the frame. They were peaceful about the trough eating another meal before they died. The boy considered them with a strange pain at his heart. He could not understand his sorrow, and he was turning away silently when he heard a shout.

V

His father had gone to one side to consider the way in which the wagon would have to be maneuvered in order to bring it to just the right position in relation with the chute. He saw that it must be moved forward to get it in line for backing. He stepped quickly to the heads of the horses to lead them up by the bridles. With straining eyes and forward-sloping ears they both shied back from him, their powerful braced legs pushing the wagon back with a terrible inexorable swiftiness, like the piston-swing of a great engine, it seemed. Yet it was a long moment. . . .

Jesse found himself on his knees, his arm reaching up to a horse's rein. If there had been a sound he had not heard it. In silence the sun was beating down on the dirty yard about him, on the scattered grimy weeds which had withstood the browsing hogs. A little cloud of dust lazily wandered away, twisting slowly across the ground. Then he heard the guzzling of the hogs at the feed he had given them — how long? — five minutes ago. And somewhere a bob-white was calling, portent of a day of rain.

Trying to hold his eyes shut, on his hands and knees he crept around to the back of the wagon.

MAD JACOB

By LEONARD LANSON CLINE

I

Ssh! There's a giant buried
Over the hill; go look.
You pass the parson's house
And turn and cross the brook
And there's his grave. You'll see
A quince tree sits
Beside it and laughs all night
Like he'd lost his wits.

They say the giant caught
A girl one dim
Green night on the road nearby,
And kissed her, and she kissed him.
He pulled a star from the sky
And gave it to her to keep;
And she scratched his hairy back
Till he went to sleep.

Then she slipped out of his arms
As her father had told her to,
And twigs and moss and turf
Over the giant she threw.
And now each night she comes —
You'll see her there perhaps —
And cries to think he's dead.
That's why Quince laughs.

For the giant's only asleep.
She didn't bury him all;
There's one fist sticking out
Of the grave, and one tall

Fat finger points at the sky.
Don't make a sound,
And if the giant dreams
He'll wiggle it around.

Yes, that's it, what you call
The church there. You'll do well,
Young man, if you never go inside.
For who can tell
When the giant may wake up,
Or when in a nightmare he
May squeeze his fingers tight?
Then where would you be!

II

They say lightning struck
The young oak tree that fell
One night twelve years ago,
And rots a log in a dell
Down by the river now.
He was a Christian youth,
They say, so clean and straight.
But that isn't the truth.

I talked to his mother once,
The old oak growing nigh,
And she told me there was no rain
That night; but out of the sky
Came only the voice of the moon
Calling, and out of the reeds
The voice of the river telling
Of travels and deeds.

And the young oak tried to follow.
Evil it is, they say,
For tree or man to wrench from his roots.
The log is rotting away,
But around it in the spring,
When it was scarce done snowing,
The bluest violets in the wood
I found were growing.

III

Say, did you see the sun
Today? I'll bet he frowned
And shook his fists and stamped
His feet on the ground!
Last night he hid in the woods
Waiting for me to pass,
But I heard him snuffling there
And buried my face in the grass.

The stars all saw him there
And scampered across the sky,
Frightened, and got behind the moon;
And she and I
Pulled shadows over us
And lay as still as we could
Once he poked his great red snout
Up out of the wood.

That's why I ran away,
You know, for hate of the sun.
I used to be his slave
And do his work and run
His errands down the street;

And I never said one word
I would have blushed to think
He'd heard.

But one night while I slept
The moon shone on my eyes.
That doesn't make men mad!
It made me wise,
And I saw the sun was not
Bright yellow but dark brown,
And every time I'd laugh
I saw he'd frown.

And I saw that not for love
My friends would call each day;
They'd only come to see
I didn't run away.
They'd sit and smile at me
But I saw their eyes were black.
O, if you try to run away
Your friends will drag you back!

That is why I came here
And why I love the moon
And stars so much. At dawn
I hide, and very soon
The sun comes tramping past
My hiding place and scowls,
Thinking to find me there.
Sometimes he howls!

IV

*If there were other lives that we
Lived long ago before this birth,
I know I was not beast of earth
Or bird of air, but a broad sea.*

*For once I lay too sad to sleep
Beneath the stars, and presently
Through all the somber depths of me
I felt the slow tide upward sweep.*

*Within me from the darkling graves
Of foundered ships it rose, until
Beneath the stars I felt it spill,
Silver with moon, in little waves.*

*And gallant ships of every sort
With oars that glistened as they dipped
In moonlight voyaged there, and slipped
Upon me safely into port.*

*I heard no more the plash of oars.
Myself that sea I felt me strew
My strength on sand and shoal, and knew
The comfort and the pain of shores.*

V

Yes, that's my dog
And Snap's his name,
Or maybe Launcelot.
Why is he lame?
That's where the old white cow
That had the yellow calf
Kicked him one night,
When the darn fool laughed.

Sure he can laugh!
I taught him that. You see
Here was a dog that knew
Anatomy,
Arboriculture,
Horses from carts,
And why one chases cats:
A dog of parts.

Wiser than most men are
Was my dog Snap;
But he couldn't laugh, and that's
A terrible handicap:
Without it there's no fame.
So I taught him how,
And he went first thing
And laughed at the cow.

Wiser is my dog Snap
Than are most men,
But he won't amount to anything now,
For he never will laugh again.
And to think he might have gone
To Washington and sat
In Congress, if you please,
With a laugh like that!

VI

Sure, there are fairies still.
There's one, now, hides
In the river where the reeds
Bend as the stream glides
Through them for a wind.
Down in the gray water
She plaits a braid of rushes.
One time I nearly caught her.

It was a misty morning
Warm with rain in the wood,
And I undressed to feel
The rain on me, and stood
A moment on the brink.
A bird called, and somehow I knew
That with my clothes I'd shed
My spirit too.

Down I swam to the bottom,
And O, but it was still!
I couldn't hear
Even the drip of rain or the trill
Of a sparrow on his branch;
And all that I could see
Was gray and blurred, the length
Of a white arm from me.

Yet I was not afraid,
For something wild
Was all remained of me:
I was a water child
And had no soul at all,
Having no clothes:
Men would not be man
Except for those.

Then I saw her. She lay
Asleep, and did not stir
When I slipped through the reeds
And hovered over her,
Wondering: and when I let
My kisses fall across
Her breast, it was
As rain on moss.

VII

*If you were given the gift of speech
Like the old prophets to invoke
The god of cedar, ash and oak,
How would you name him, Father Beech?*

*Yet even now when I behold
Your people stand with lifted limbs
And listen to their susurrant hymns
I know the god that they extol.*

*Maple, poplar, linden, elm,
With sturdy trunk and generous spread
Of branches reaching overhead,
In his own image made he them.*

*And he ordained them to be tall
And hold their leaves against the sun
For shade, and ask not any one
Farthing or faith, but shelter all.*

*My god that frowns denying me,
His priests have taught him to abhor.
Ah, Father Beech! I would adore
God in the likeness of a tree!*

VIII

Now, I'm an ogre, Jimmy,
And I know lots of witches
Hereabouts in the woods.
They gather hazel switches
Whenever the moon is full,
And then, delightful creatures,
They fly away to visit
Sunday school teachers.

Honest, Jimmy! Away
They fly on their brooms,
And slip in the windows
Of the teacher's room,
And dance across his bed,
And pull the covers aside,
And spank him with their switches
Until he cries!

Cross my heart, Jimmy!
And if he wakes
They throw upon his eyes
A spider's web that makes
Him blind for a little while.
Then all that he can see
Is moonlight, but he can hear
Them laughing merrily.

Really! Some Sunday morning,
If your teacher should yawn,
Go up to him when all
The other boys are gone,
And whisper, "I guess last night
The witches danced on your bed
And spanked you with their switches!"
O, but he'll get red!

You don't believe me? Why,
Jimmy, you ought to know
That ogres don't tell fibs.
There's none to spank them, so
They never have to. Indeed,
That's just the reason why
Ogres get to be ogres:
They never lie.

IX

MORAL INSTRUCTION FOR THRIFTY CHILDREN

Behold the banker! lean and frail,
His cheek is sunk, his brow is pale;
He has forgotten how to laugh,
 He's sour as a pickle.
He never learned to spin a top,
He shuns the luscious lollipop,
He has a dollar and a half
 And never spends a nickel.

Alack the banker! See him sit
On top his treasure guarding it;
He sits and shivers fearfully,
 He dreads the bandit's gun.
And see, the burglar with his bat
Tapping the banker on the hat!
The jolly fellow laughs with glee,
 He'll have a lot of fun.

Children, beware! Put not away
Your penny for a rainy day;
Before that comes a burglar might.

 Think, think before you save!
Never was coined a silver dime
But that it must be spent sometime.
Spend it yourselves, and you will spite
 The burglar and the grave.

X

There was a party last night
At the big white house. I lay
Under the hedge, and heard
A fiddler play
That Wieniawski thing
With the gray melody. . . .
And then the cop walked by
And stumbled over me.

Of course I had to run,
And when I came out here
I fell down in the grass
And cried. . . . Queer,
But music meant so much
Last night, and on the hill
I never knew before
It was so still. . . .

Right at my side she sat
And combed her hair to dry
Beneath the yellow moon.
I heard her sigh;
And "Who are you?" I asked,
"With such soft eyes and long
Green hair?" And she replied,
"I? . . . I am a song."

"I am your song," she said,
"And I am very young;
And if you love me, ah!
Leave me unsung!"

For they that sing their songs
Slay them as well, and never
See them again,
Forever.

“But if you let me live,
Then I will dance for you,
And you may kiss my lips,
And run your fingers through
My long green hair. And I
Each night hereafter
More beautiful will be,
With lovelier laughter.” . . .

White was her smooth throat
And white her knees;
Her hair upon my face
Was as if locust trees
Shook blossoms down on me.
And at the first bird's cheep,
I put my head upon her arm
And went to sleep.

XI

*With yellow blurt of lights and roar
Of cars a late express careens
Around the bend. Now darkness leans
Upon this willow copse once more*

*Thrice-dark, and measureless increase
Of silence clusters in this glade.
I that was lonely and afraid
Am lonelier still and quite at peace.*

*Thus when life leaves me I shall sit
In a dark glade amid the fall
Of silence even as this, and all
That was will seem as windows lit*

*In a bright train that shook the ground
And passed me by: at each a face.
So I may wonder for a space
Who were they all and whither bound.*

*But soon I shall cease wondering,
Thankful the roar and glare were swift,
Thankful for the assuaging gift
Of silence ever deepening.*

THE BUCKING PALFREY

By RAYMOND WEEKS

Good Leonidas Segwin never had any luck with his wives.¹

He lost all of them in the same manner. One fine morning, he came down stairs expecting to find on the snowy tablecloth his usual light breakfast of coffee, ham and eggs, hot biscuit or corn-pone, batter-cakes and honey, and found nothing at all—the table not set, the stove cold, the house empty. He called aloud the name on which he had last hung festoons,—Sally, Mollie, Susie, or Patience, according to the occasion—but mewing cats, whining dogs and desolation were his only answers.

Where did they go? Apparently they all vanished in the same direction—westward, toward Independence, whose church spire beckoned them to unholy freedom, toward the Big Blue and Goose Neck, regions known to be entirely godless, toward young and brazen Kansas City, seated on her impudent hills, toward corrupt, unprincipled Westport and the adventurous western plains, stretching clear to the mountains full of gold. Neither the caresses of their lord and master, nor fear of unknown dangers restrained them, nor yet consideration of his honor, for he was a man of his word: when a woman had promised that she would love, honor and obey him, he tried to see that she did so. His wives seemed to be independent women, wishing air and liberty at any cost.

Poor Mr. Segwin, who understood nothing about the nature of his wives, was in consternation. He used to declare at each fresh disappearance:

“That’s enough for me! Never again! I’m through with them! I’ll never marry another, never!”

¹ Compare the beginning of this true story with “*La Chèvre de M. Seguin*” of Alphonse Daudet. It is not known who related to Daudet the affairs of Leonidas Segwin.

He was heard to exclaim this several times when Patience disappeared: "I'll never marry another, never!" But he did. Only this time, he decided to choose the next one very, very young, with the down still on her, so to speak. Would not a hand-picked bride of say sixteen — he was only thirty-seven — be able to resist the temptations of living on the great high-way from the Atlantic seaboard to Westport and within sight of a town like Independence? It seemed worth trying, especially as he had tried everything else.

There was no young girl of this sort living within ten miles of his rich lands, but that did not defeat his ardent soul. He began riding forth on his quest nearly every morning. As he stood waiting for Bill, one of his black men, to bring up his favorite saddle horse, he made indeed the appearance of a handsome man — perhaps a shade stocky, an enemy might have said, but with round, florid countenance, cheeks and upper lip shaven, a silky, red beard flowing over his manly chest, excellent clothes of stout brown cloth, the trousers tucked into the tops of tall, well-oiled boots, a broad-brimmed sombrero over his left ear. Without of course telling any one of his sublime quest — men are so uncharitable! — he commenced to desery widening circles around his habitation — circles with a radius of ten, fifteen, twenty miles — combing the territory on both banks of the raging Missouri, and going as far south as the Sniabar. Nobody! nothing!

Those who saw Mr. Segwin riding about said to one another:

"There's Lonnie Segwin hunting for Patience."

Patience indeed! Little did they know! If he had suddenly come upon her mired in the red mud, he would have ridden coldly by, saying:

"Look on me for the last time!"

When Mr. Segwin had exhausted the country within reach, he did not abandon himself to despair, as a man of

fewer inches would have done. Instead, he sat for days under the big oak in front of his house — it was in July — and meditated with the aid of his pipe. Finally, an idea came to him:

“By Solomon! I never thought of it! Here I’ve been beating the brush for twenty miles around, when within sight of my door runs the great highway from the Atlantic seaboard to Westport, where scores of families pass every week, some of them in distress! I’m sure to find there a pretty slip of a creature which the family would be glad to unload!”

Accordingly, every morning Mr. Segwin strolled down the long walk to the road, leaned his rotundity against the gate, and turned his expectant countenance toward the east, for nearly all the covered wagons came from that direction. Sometimes as many as five or six passed in a day, most of them drawn by poor, tired horses or pessimistic mules. Frequently an unhappy cow was tied to the rear of the wagon, and nearly always some foot-sore dogs followed. When one of these wagons drew near, Mr. Segwin’s keen eyes plunged under the canvas cover in search of the innocent little creature whom he sought. If there seemed to be any prospect, he engaged the head of the family in conversation, and invited them all in to take a meal with him. He was a hospitable man, as you see.

Mr. Segwin at last bought from an impoverished immigrant a telescope about two feet long, and from this time on, life held for him new charms. He now scrutinized from the distance of a mile the interior of the covered wagons, and exclaimed under his breath: “Come, curls! come, girls,” much as unholy gamblers mutter over the bones: “Come, seven! come, eleven!”

But the curls did not come. Mid-August was now raging. There were hours when Mr. Segwin doubted Providence — and then, suddenly, the curls came!

It was the close of a hot day. He had been leaning on the gate, looking off east, for a good hour, without having seen as much as a rabbit, when he turned his head to get the kink out of his neck, and saw a covered wagon coming down the hill nearly a mile away to the west. He swept it with his glass, and cried:

"Gardens of Solomon! it's her!"

He did not take his eyes off her until the wagon was within a quarter of a mile of him, and then his hands began to shake so that he could no longer keep the wagon within his field of vision. And why this trembling? Because he had seen — clearly — that the young girl driving the approaching horses was weeping! He saw her more than once brush the tears from her cheeks, holding the reins with one hand.

Mr. Segwin rose to the occasion. He laid aside his telescope and sauntered out into the road to await the coming of the wagon. As the young girl was bringing the horses to a stop in answer to his gesture, he heard a weary voice from behind her in the wagon say:

"Sylvia, I don't think I can go any further."

It was the voice of a man. Mr. Segwin nodded to the girl in a reassuring way, leaped up to the seat beside her and looked into the back of the wagon. He saw there a sick man, very pale under his dark, shaggy beard. He was lying on loose straw in the bottom of the wagon bed, at his feet a mongrel dog. Fifteen minutes later, the stranger, Sylvia's father, was resting in a comfortable bed at Mr. Segwin's, the horses were being bountifully cared for, and the additional black woman whom he had hired when Patience ran away, was flying around the kitchen, preparing supper for three.

From Sylvia, Mr. Segwin learned how her father and she had lost nearly everything on the prairies beyond Westport, how he had been taken with a wasting fever, and how they had started back east, hoping to reach

their former home in western Kentucky. The doctor, summoned the next morning, gave little hope. The sick man lingered for a month. His last days were consoled by good Mr. Segwin, who explained to him that there was something better than leaving Sylvia with doubtful old friends; that Providence had placed on her path a rich, lonely and kindly gentleman (Mr. Segwin), who, to console the last moments of her deserving and courageous father, would be glad to marry her. At her father's request, she consented with tears, and became Mrs. Leonidas Segwin.

Toward the close, her father had said to her: "Don't cry for me, honey — not after the first days! I want you to be happy, to sing, laugh, ride horseback, run about and be just like you've always been."

These injunctions and her youth soon gave Sylvia an appearance of happiness. She was just seventeen, which as you know, is the ideal age for a bride. Besides, she found herself the mistress of a large house and a thousand acres of land in an earthly paradise. The farm animals all came to love her, for she was kind and talked to them in the sweetest voice in the world. Wherever she went, on foot or on horseback, some of the dogs accompanied her, chief among them being her mongrel, who answered to the name of Governor. She had with her more and more constantly Sophronia Paintor, the daughter of a none too rich but honest neighbor who lived down the road to the east. Sophie was thirty-five, but thin. The difference in age proved no barrier. Sophie had been the first woman to come to assist and console Sylvia during the terrible days of her father's illness. Their friendship developed into affection, deep and genuine.

One bond between them was their love of horses. Both of them had, so to speak, been raised on horseback. They liked to ride at a gallop, and were fond of what was

called "trick riding." But what gave them perhaps most amusement was to ride a bucking mustang. Sophie already possessed such an animal, and, by spring, Sylvia had developed unsurpassed bucking qualities in Rosebud, a demure palfrey belonging to Mr. Segwin. Rosebud was white. Have you ever thought how difficult it is to be a white horse? Think of not having a dark hair on you! This in itself is an achievement.

Mr. Segwin would have given Sylvia all the horses on his farm, he was so delighted with her. Here at last he possessed the dream of a lifetime — a plump, pretty little creature, allowing herself to be petted and caressed without scratching, always gay and smiling, a unique piece right out of King Solomon's better period, a love of a girl! It is true that she had from the beginning refused to do the heavy housework, but what of that? He rejoiced at it now, for it left her time and spirit to fill his house and meadows and pastures with the ravishing riot of youth. And when she did take a notion to work — trotting about the house in a great bib-apron, her black curls hanging down her back, or, at the spring-house, moulding the butter with bare arms which it was criminal to show — Mr. Segwin used to watch her as long as he dared, then turn to some fixed object, like an oak, and say to it: "Tell me, am I Lonnie Segwin?"

He sometimes accompanied Sylvia and Sophronia to an open slope in the nearest pasture, where they amused themselves on their bucking horses. But more frequently — was it because of his fat? — he remained under the shade of one of the big trees by the house, watching them through his telescope, which meant watching mostly little Sylvia. Now he saw Rosebud come down the slope stiff-legged with Sylvia on his back. It was not unlike being dragged down a staircase seated on the end of a board. Then, on more level ground, Rosebud commenced to kick, and kept it up for many minutes — violent, heaven-

reaching kicks, the kicks of a lifetime, kicks, which, like Columbus, started with the intention of arriving, and all this time Sylvia sat erect, acknowledging each kick with a bow of her head and laughing curls. Then Rosebud reared upright and fenced with the air, until the curls brushed his furious mane, then for a while he let fly with all four feet in all directions, but his rider rode the storm, keeping her bearings with the astonished universe. Then perhaps Rosebud began whirling on himself as on a pivot, after which he jumped as high as he could and came down stiff-legged.

The shouts and laughter of the two amazons, both of whom had shrill voices that meant to be heard, reached the ears of Sylvia's owner and master, who, with gesticulations and running exclamations followed the sport, holding to his eye the precious telescope. At an exceptionally high kick of Rosebud, he might have been heard to cry: "Peaks of the Andes! what a kick!" and at one of his stiff-legged jumps: "Stones of Jerusalem! what a jolt!"

He was proud of Sylvia, proud of Rosebud, proud of the thin and charming Sophronia, proud of himself. No wonder that he did not object to certain new quavers which Sylvia introduced into his life, such as better furniture, a neater house, more regular habits. He became her slave without knowing it and without ceasing to regard himself as the prince of princes.

And then arrived the fated days of a hot, miasmatic June, when the dark, dark, gray eyes stopped laughing and became indifferent to everything, except to dear Sophronia, and the bountiful black curls lay tossing about on the white pillow. Sylvia had a fever, a high, stubborn fever which left the doctor graver than Mr. Segwin had ever seen him. Most of the time, Mr. Segwin was banished from the sick chamber, and when he was there the gray eyes never once met his with any touch of

intimate remembrance. He wandered, bareheaded and desperate, under the great shade trees, through the young orchard, out into the woods. Quite needless now to dress neatly, to comb and brush his long chin whisker and shave carefully his round cheeks and rosy upper lip. And the torture of regret which assails delicate natures at such times — could he not have been more indulgent, more considerate, could he not have found a score of original and touching ways to make her realize the jewel which she possessed in him? Could he not have shaved more often? Too late, eternally too late! He walked, making gestures and talking to himself. The hired men and the two black women looked at him with fear and pity.

At times, Sylvia was conscious and Sophie permitted him to remain in the room for a few minutes. On one of these occasions, he entered, holding behind his back a large piece of white wrapping paper. Sylvia recognized him, but the space which he occupied might have been vacant for any change in her expression. She made no reply to his inquiries, and Sophie was on the point of signalling him to leave the room, when he bent over the bed and said in his tenderest tones:

“Listen, little Sylvia. It’s me, your Lonnie. I want to tell you that I think about you every second, and I’ve written the epitaph which I’m going to have carved for you at Saint Louis, on white marble, my dear, on the whitest marble, if you die.”

He held up before her the paper, and her eyes, newly returned from the undiscovered country, looked at it blankly, then slowly, slowly stammered through the big, printed letters, then closed, and her lips were seen to enunciate the first words she had spoken to him for weeks: “Please go now.” He tiptoed out of the room.

Here is what her eyes had read:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY
OF
SYLVIA SEGWIN
WIFE OF
ONE OF
NATURE'S NOBLEMEN

Something which might be sobs or laughter commenced to course through Sylvia's body. Sophie was frightened and drew her close in an embrace. But it was laughter, laughter so great that it threatened to extinguish the frail life! When at last she could speak, she whispered:

"Sophie, I know now that I'm going to get well."

Two or three days later, she asked Sophie to send for Mr. Segwin and leave them alone for a few minutes. Mr. Segwin had to bend close to hear the words, whispered rather than spoken by the blistered, tortured lips:

"Mr. Segwin — "

"Please, Sylvia! call me Lon or Lonnie!"

"Lon, it's possible that I shall never speak with you again." He interrupted her with sobbed protestations. She waited a moment and then continued:

"All things are possible. I want you to give me a solemn promise." Her words came slowly. "Some women who are lying where I am get their husbands to swear never to remarry. . . . I'm not that sort. . . . I want you to remarry, but — " she was fixing him with her deep, half-closed gray eyes — "I ask you not to remarry as long as Rosebud stops bucking, if he stops — "

Mr. Segwin looked at her in a startled way, and took her hand, thinking that she was out of her head. She went on:

"Don't think I'm out of my mind. My fever's gone down this evening. I know what I'm saying. . . .

You know, sometimes he hasn't bucked for several months. . . . You can wait that long, can't you? — It's true, he didn't buck at all before I came, so they say, but now he bucks nearly all the time. . . . It won't be long. Promise!"

Mr. Segwin felt sure that she was raving, that she was dying. He was weeping again.

"Darling little Sylvia, I'll never remarry if you . . . if you leave me!"

"I refuse that promise. Do you make me the other?" Her voice was becoming fainter.

"I do, Sylvia!"

"Do you swear it?"

"I do."

"One other thing, and then leave me . . . I love Sophie . . . A heart of gold. Cherish her for memory of me."

His sobs and the pressure of his hand on hers gave this second promise, and, crying like a child, he left the room. As he closed the door, a semblance of a smile flitted over the blistered lips and about the deep, gray eyes. When Sophie returned, she found Sylvia asleep.

Sylvia was recovering. She was at last able to sit up, then to be carried down-stairs like a baby and laid on a soft couch in the sitting room. Through these days she clung more and more tenderly to Sophie, and in one of their long talks she asked her to take care of her father's grave, if the time ever came when she, Sylvia, was no longer there.

Late July brought added strength, and she was again able to put flowers on her father's grave. In August she began to ride horseback again. Rosebud bore her as gently as if he had known that she had been ill. She rode farther and farther day by day, in the company of her beloved Sophie and some of the dogs, including of course Governor. But she was much changed. She now dressed her hair like a married woman. She went about doing

things in a melancholy way, and a puzzled look became habitual to her little brow.

And then — she disappeared. It was sometime during a dark September night, with chill frost in the air. Mr. Segwin found her room vacant the next morning. The bed had not been slept in, her clothes and shoes were in their place, nothing seemed lacking, but the colored women discovered that the clothes which she wore when she came were gone — the faded linsey-woolsey dress, the poor little hat, the old shoes and one or two handkerchiefs. Mr. Segwin remembered that she kept in a trunk the small sum of money which she and her father had brought with them. The key was in the lock of the trunk, the money was gone. Sweat stood on Mr. Segwin's brow. He flew down-stairs and out to the stables. The better of the two horses which she had brought with her had disappeared, also the side-saddle which had belonged to her mother. And then it was found that Governor too had gone.

"In the name of Solomon!" murmured Mr. Segwin to himself, "what is the matter with my wives?"

And at the thought of losing the sweet and lovely Sylvia, bitterness swept over the generous man:

"Lose her? I should say not! I'll save her in spite of herself!"

He set about finding her with all the ingenuity which long practice had given him. Any hoof-prints which Sylvia's horse may have made as he left the stable had been obliterated, either by her or by the two colored men when they did their morning chores. Mr. Segwin called the men, and the three of them hurried down the road to the gate, where they got on all fours to examine minutely the grass out to, and along by, the highway, both to the east and the west. Not a trace of a horse or a dog! Most of the farm being unfenced, she might have escaped at any one of many points, and she knew the whole country perfectly.

After an hour spent in vain, he left the men to continue the search, with promise of a liberal reward if they succeeded, flew back to the stables, tossed a saddle on a horse, and rode bareheaded and like mad to Sophie's house. She and her father were at breakfast when he dashed into the yard, leaped from the horse and rushed into the kitchen:

"Where's Sylvia?"

"Sylvia? Why, we haven't seen her!"

"Soul of Solomon! then she's run away!"

Sophie and her father offered to ride eastward and cover forty or fifty miles of road. Mr. Segwin dashed home at full speed, swallowed a light breakfast, seized his telescope and hat, mounted his swiftest horse and started for Independence, sweeping with his telescope the road in front of him and the distant fields and woods. He inquired at every house and of every person he met: "You haven't seen my wife? She's disappeared — she's been very sick, you know?" No news anywhere — neither at Independence, nor along the ten mile road to the west, nor at Kansas City, nor Westport, nor Shawnee Mission, nor at the ferry over the Kaw. Nothing, nothing! Mr. Segwin clung to the remote hope of a discovery, and rode for days and days, muttering often to himself: "Soul of Solomon! what is the matter with my wives?" People looked with surprise and pity at the frenzied man, who carried the strange brass tube.

At last he started for home, unkempt, heart-broken. But perhaps the hired men or Sophie and her father had found his lovely little Sylvia? Perhaps she had returned of her own accord? Perhaps she had never run away? He rode hard. No news of Sylvia awaited him! She had not been heard of, she had not come back — alas! no news of her came that year, nor the next year, nor any year. She never was heard of again. Had the glamor of the great West returned to dazzle her, or, more likely, had

she heard in her illness far-away accents of remembered voices, back home in Kentucky? Or had she, like the others, simply run away?

Mr. Segwin was for many months in despair such as he had not hitherto endured. Needless now to dress neatly, to shave every two days his rosy cheeks and lip! He continued his search, but he felt that he would never see Sylvia again.

It was on the third day after the disappearance of little Sylvia, at about one o'clock, that Sophie, back from a search, commenced to set her room to rights, and found under the bed a letter addressed to her in the childish writing of Sylvia. The room was on the ground floor, and the letter had been thrown in at the window the night her chum fled. She tore open the envelope and there lay before her a sealed envelope and a brief letter. On the sealed envelope stood written Sophie's name, and the words: "Not to be opened until two years from the time you receive this letter." She ran to lock this envelope in her trunk, then read breathlessly the brief letter of Sylvia. It was a letter of the utmost tenderness, despite some awkwardness in the expression, and told how Sylvia loved her and would always love her more than any other woman, except her dead mother; how she was fleeing and would never return, nor would she dare to write her sweet Sophie; how Sophie must not mention her letter to anyone, and would she be kind to Rosebud, and, especially, *not forget the flowers?*

Sophie carried out these injunctions with the fervor of undying friendship. As for Mr. Segwin, his sufferings increased with time. Long before the first year of his solitude had passed a struggle was going on in his august spirit: Should he, or should he not, remarry? Was he bound by his promise to Sylvia? A man of fewer inches would have said no, but Mr. Segwin was a man of honor — he had promised not to remarry as long as Rosebud

refused to buck. An absurd promise, surely, and he must not let the neighbors know of it. Buck, why! of course Rosebud would buck! He hadn't been ridden for a year, he must be dying to buck, to buck all over the farm, to buck from there to Independence, to buck all over the county! Mr. Segwin needed only mount him to find himself freed from his ridiculous oath — only, he hesitated, he felt ashamed. . .

Finally, one Sunday, when all the others had gone to church, Mr. Segwin slipped furtively out to the pasture, caught Rosebud, saddled and bridled him and rode out across the meadows to the depths of the forest paths. The horse trotted along, powerful and keen, but obedient — not a sign of bucking. Mr. Segwin began to dig his heels into Rosebud's ribs, and Rosebud began to run like the wind. The bushes lashed Mr. Segwin's face, his hat was carried away, and then a branch struck him breast high and swept him from the saddle, but he kept hold of the reins. Furious, he cut a stout stick, remounted and commenced to belabor Rosebud's sides, crying:

"Buck, will you! Damn you, buck! By the mule of Solomon, I tell you, buck!"

But Rosebud simply ran. He understood Mr. Segwin, and he would have been glad to buck, in fact, he wanted to buck, but his sweet little mistress — where was she, his angel of a mistress? — had taught him and told him never to buck without a certain signal, and he too had promised. He too was a man of honor. He could not, he would not, buck without that signal!

The days and months which followed were terrible times for good Mr. Segwin. To carry such a secret locked in your chest! To have no outlook, no escape! He formed the habit of talking to himself, and the neighbors touched their foreheads when he was mentioned. But hope never dies. It occurred to him that perhaps Rosebud would buck if a lady were on his back. Accordingly, one day when he

saw Sophronia passing thru the yard after a visit to the family burying-ground, he said as carelessly as he could:

"Miss Sophie, Rosebud's there in the stable. Wouldn't you like to see if you can make him buck?"

Indeed she would! She dearly loved a bucking horse. Mr. Segwin feverishly saddled Rosebud and helped her mount. She tried her best for half an hour, but Rosebud did not depart from the behavior of the most docile palfrey. Sophie never knew the despair in Mr. Segwin's breast as he aided her to alight. . . . It was clear: he was bound for life, bound, it is true, by a phantom of honor, but bound for ever. . . .

You may be sure that Sophie kept track of the calendar, that she counted the months and the days of interdiction that lay between her eyes and the sealed letter in her trunk. Long before the day came, she had learned with displeasure that the only event at the Kansas City fair for which she was entered—the bucking contest for lady riders—had been set for halfpast one on the fated day. At one o'clock she would have had the letter for exactly two years. How aggravating! She decided to pin the letter in her bosom, to try to find an opportunity to read it at the fair-grounds at one and keep her engagement at one-thirty.

The great day dawned, beautiful under its soft September haze. Sophie stood waiting in her black riding-habit for her father to bring up the horses, but he came to tell her that her bucking mustang, the only bucker they possessed, had sprained his foot in the night. Well, that settled it! Only, she did want to go to the fair, contest or no contest, and they had no other saddle-horse. Perhaps Mr. Segwin could lend her one? Carrying the train of the black riding-habit on her arm, she walked up to Mr. Segwin's. Now, Mr. Segwin hated women, and for reason; he saw red every time he thought of them, but for Sophie he had more tolerant feelings. She had stood

so close to Sylvia that she remained near to him. He gladly lent her Rosebud, with the saddle and bridle which Sylvia had always used in riding him. She laughed her thanks and rode away in company with her father, Rosebud jogging along with the docility of a camel. Mr. Segwin was going to remain at home. He had passed part of one day at the fair. He disliked crowds—the sight of so many women and girls made him suffer. Having nothing to do, he sauntered down to the road with his telescope to follow the departing figures on horse-back: who knew, perhaps Rosebud . . . But no! nothing!

At one o'clock Sylvia slipped out of the crowd, and standing apart under a beautiful tree read Sylvia's letter: "Dearest Sophie, do not laugh at what I write here, but follow exactly what I say and you will not regret it. My peace of mind depends on your obedience. I taught Rosebud to buck, and to buck only when he receives a signal. Here it is. At the back of my saddle, on the right side, there is an opening between the felt and the leather. Slip a horse-chestnut or a small walnut into this place, get on his back and say: 'Now, Rosebud,' and he will do the rest. He loves to buck. Ride him often. Good-bye."

Her train over her arm, Sophie hurried from walnut tree to walnut tree on our beautiful fair grounds, until she found a small walnut. Then she hastened to where Rosebud stood, slipped the walnut into the place indicated, untied Rosebud and led him to where the other entries were gathering.

And the contest! In a sense, there was no contest, nothing visible, except the deliriously droll, happy Rosebud and the thin lady with roses in her cheeks, who calmly rode the storm of his fantastic capers. The judges did not need to retire to consult, and Sophie's rivals themselves hurried to congratulate her before the judges came to deck her and her hat and Rosebud with extravagant lengths of blue ribbon.

When it came time to start for home, she deftly removed the walnut and put it in her pocket. She and her father rode away amidst the plaudits of the throngs, and they were the happiest of all the many thousands. They passed through Independence like an emperor and his daughter. They had reached a spot about half a mile from Mr. Segwin's house, when Sophie slipped the walnut into its place, and said to Rosebud: "Now, Rosebud!" Good-bye, meek palfrey, good-bye, soft ambler! His four hoofs flew out simultaneously, he jumped, zig-zagged, backed, reared, kicked, plunged — in short, did the most marvelous bucking of his entire career.

Mr. Segwin, having nothing to do except to wait for supper, had strolled out to the road to watch for the return of Sophie. The most exquisite of autumnal hazes lay over the rich and beautiful country and shone golden in the reflected glory of the sun, which had just set. Mr. Segwin stood with his feet wide apart to brace his rotundity, while he raised the telescope to his eye and looked up the road toward Independence. In a cloud of dust, he saw a revolving, jumping, kicking white monster, mounted by what seemed a calm goddess, whose form was surrounded by eddies and billows of black robe, with here and there on both creatures a flash of blue. . .

"Gardens of Solomon!" cried Mr. Segwin in a loud voice, "it's Rosebud bucking, with Sophie on his back!" And, bareheaded as he was, he started running up the road, brandishing his telescope, yelling, stopping at times to clap the telescope to his eye and catch one more glimpse of the explosion taking place on ahead, then starting on again, gesticulating, screaming unintelligible words: "Jerusalem! . . . Cedars! . . . Lebanon! . . . Andes! . . . Rosebud! . . . Sophie! . . . Solomon!" When he could scream no longer, he panted along, his cheeks wet with tears of gratitude and inarticulate joy, his eyes fixed on the slowly advancing cloud of dust. . . .

THE POET

By WARREN L. VAN DINE

Joey never liked to work with me.

It wasn't that he complained about the way I treated him as some boys do, especially farm boys. I gave him a square deal, with plenty to eat and wear and a chance to go to school. He liked his dad and enjoyed living with him. It was just that he wasn't born into the carpenter trade.

Somehow he was different from me and my way of plugging along. He was built by a different plan, I guess, just as some houses are entirely unlike others. He was high up in the clouds, with a roof that shone in the sun, while I'm lower and sort of spread out in a common way for service.

He was put up according to his mother, I can see now. I'm not saying that ain't a good way either; it's a mighty good one, too good for me and this town of Carter. But all the same it made a gap between us.

I noticed the same difference between her and me after we were married. But I didn't think anything about it then. And she wasn't a man and didn't have to carpenter, and so it didn't make any difference. But it was there just the same.

We were married over in the next county, in Iowa, across the river. Mary was a farm girl, and had been raised by a man with a lot of land. But she wasn't his real daughter; she was just his adopted girl. He had gotten her at some orphan asylum in the East where her folks had left her. They had been English people, artists or professors or something like that, and had died without any money while starving to try and travel through this country. They had only the one girl, and she fell into the hands of the Iowa people. They raised her good, to cook and all that of course, and let her be a school

teacher when she wanted to do something away from home. She was teaching school here in Carter when I met her.

She liked me right from the first though I can't tell why. I sure didn't know much in those days — if I do yet. But I was big, with broad shoulders, and knew how to handle my mustache just right. She let me come to see her for a good many years and then said she'd marry me, when I got up courage enough to ask her one day. And I've never regretted having done it though some men advise against getting married, saying two times one is two and all that. That may be but then I never did a greater thing in all my life than to try starting a home of my own.

Yes, we were married on the farm. A good country wedding is about the best start a man can make no matter where he's from. Her daddy didn't spare money to give us a swell send-off, and everyone that knew us turned out. We stood up before the old minister of Carter that I took along over there with me and were made man and wife. I can remember it all just as well, with everyone setting around in big chairs in the front room quiet-like, and the preacher that's been dead so long now speaking in clear tones. It was almost like a picture, the whole scene. And then afterwards Mary and I went together over to the stand table that was loaded with presents, mostly shining silverware and glass dishes. . . . It's just about the best memory of my life.

When it was all over we had a short honeymoon in Chicago. Then we came here to Carter to this house that I'd built with some money I had saved from two or three years' work. We settled down with some furniture I bought on the installment plan at a store at the County Seat, and began living. Up till then our acquaintance had been just like the summer time, more as though things were only being talked about. From then on it

was bound to be more like winter with the storms and happenings actually upon us.

From the very first we were different. I hate to say it but we were. It wasn't that we were quarrelsome and couldn't get along as some people. We weren't that way, and we had sense enough never to be. It's such mighty little stuff, I figure, when a man and his wife stoop to fighting that it ain't worth while. No, it wasn't that there was actual strife between us. We sort of compromised, always taking into consideration that maybe the other was right too. There was really nothing to keep us apart if we could ever have gotten together. It was just that we soon found out that we hadn't been built by God Almighty to the same plan.

We could never see things in quite the same way. Mary thought that a man had ought to climb up in the world and get to be somebody. Going to everything from church to visiting people was one of her ideas of accomplishing it. She believed that being in sight did a lot of good. And trying to be an important man in the community, maybe an elder in the church or county supervisor or something like that, always having to make speeches before your fellow citizens, was another of her ways. A lot of fire and push and get up won the race, she believed. And reading books so as to get to be wise, she stood for that. She had an old saying that she had picked up somewhere about knowledge being power. Those things were her opinion of what makes a success. But I could never quite see it that way. I wanted to build good buildings that the owners could be proud of and I could be proud of, and then come home of nights and rest after eating good suppers. It didn't set very well with me to have to wear white collars half the time, especially on Sunday when I needed to be comfortable and get ready for the next week. And I never did take much to mixing up in general affairs such as running for

offices. It always seemed a lot of energy wasted for nothing, for generally the office don't pay anything and most of the time it takes pay from a person. And I never could do much reading, though I liked to hear Mary read, especially poetry, because her voice was so low and soft-like. But I could never do it myself; it was long and hard for me. It wasn't like working with something solid like lumber where a man could build with his hand and brain moving together. It may be, of course, that just rough work isn't enough, but it seemed to me then, and it does yet, that it is. We had ought to be happy, I told Mary, with a home and plenty to eat and wear and good health.

But she dreamed of doing great things. Maybe if I'd followed her I'd have gotten to be a big man in the country, maybe president. She told me of presidents that had risen from nothing. But I didn't really want to do anything like that. I wanted to keep right on building as I had started in to do. So she finally gave up trying to make anything high up out of me and turned her attention to Joey, for she was carrying him by that time. She laid plans years ahead for him to be a great man.

"Suppose, Mary, it's a girl," I said. "Then all these things you're thinking about can't happen."

"It can't be a girl," she declared.

She was right. She gave me Joey. But it cost her her life to do it.

I put her to rest in the little graveyard north of town. The old minister who married us preached the funeral sermon. It was the last one he ever preached for he took sick from the exposure of going in the cold and storm to the cemetery, and passed away a little later himself. I remember in his talk he quoted from the Bible about if a person dies he shall surely live again. I knew it was true when I looked into her cold white face for the last time.

"She was a good wife," I said to myself, "and the best friend I've ever had."

After that I lived for Joey.

I raised him myself, with the help of his grandmother in Iowa, who took him for long stretches at a time when he was right little. I kept him in school, and saw to it especially that he was taught reading and writing and 'rithmetic as the old song says. If a man knows just that much it's a mighty great help to him, I've found out. And I taught him to work outside of school as he was able, to run errands, to mow the yard, to keep the house in order, and other common duties. He would have to earn his living sometime, I figured, and it would be a good thing for him to know how to do it.

When he was old enough I had him work with me steady, during his vacations, at the carpenter trade. I had a big business then for a man just living in Carter; I always had a schoolhouse or a church to build of a summer, and a lot of houses and barns. I was generally on one of these jobs with my men, and I took the boy along with me. I taught him as best I could how to saw a board off square and how to drive a nail, and that's about all any carpenter can do when it's all said and done. And better than that I taught him to be on the job when he said he would and to give a man a full day's work when he was there. He picked up the trade very quickly — of course he didn't get on to all the fine points of it right at once. I've never done that myself yet and I've worked at it a mighty long time — but he caught on fast if I do say it. He soon got to be as good a carpenter as I had hired.

But he didn't like to work with me, I could see, or if he did he liked to do other things better. He did his work well but not with the spirit for building and nothing else that I had when I was his age. He seemed to want to watch houses go up rather than send them up himself.

In fact he was always queer that way; he was more of an onlooker in life than one of the people mixed up in it.

He wouldn't get out among folks much but just set around staring at the sun going down across the prairies or the clouds spreading their wings like big white birds, or read books of poetry that his mother had left and I had kept because they were hers. I always kind of thought that it was his being raised by a man that made him like that, instead of getting out and playing baseball and fighting like other boys.

And then he was writing poetry. That took his interest and energy so that he didn't have any left to put into his everyday work. But he had to work with me because he could make money that way to go to school on. He wanted to go to high school and college and I couldn't hardly send him without some help. He had to go away to both, as we don't have any schools above the common grades here in Carter though we'd ought to have. He went to the County Seat to high school and to the state university to college. It took money. And he couldn't make any of it by poetry. He might have done it by writing if he had been putting out stories. The men doing that get rich at it. But that wasn't his line in the writing trade so he had to carpenter to get an education.

I thought maybe his going to college would make a man of him, not exactly that, but cure him of his setting around and get him interested in some labor. But it didn't. He never went in for things around school though it was a big school for that, always playing football or having something going on. I was up there to visit Joey once and went with him to see a home game with Iowa university just after they had cleaned up on some school in the East. It was some affair. They were always having something equally as exciting, Joey told me. But he never got into any of it. He liked to watch it and all that but he didn't seem to have the ambition to do it himself. He never even got acquainted to speak of there. At least when I was up to visit him he never

spoke to anyone on the street like he was going to school with them or had ever seen them before. He just drifted along through the crowds as though he didn't care much about how things happened. He didn't, I knew, not a bit more than he cared about working for me. I think he even failed to pass in all his studies. At least I got a letter from the head of something up there telling me that my boy was just about to fail. I never showed it to him because I knew it wouldn't do any good. It wasn't that he didn't know enough to pass; it was just that he hadn't thought it worth while to see about the matter. And if he didn't think it was what was I to do about it.

He never even had his picture in the college book, a big book that the school puts out at the end of the year telling all about what's been done during the time and showing pictures of who done it. When I asked him why he had never put in a picture of himself as he was as good looking as anyone there and better than most of them he laughed and said something about fools' faces being seen in public places.

"It's mighty good judgment, I'll have to admit," I thought, "But then I would like to have seen him in there."

He quit going to college after three years, though he wasn't put out because of failing, I've found out since from the men of the school. He just stopped at the end of the year and went to work with me. I told him that I'd understood at first that he was supposed to go four years but he said he didn't want to go any more, and I never questioned him further. I figured that he knew when to end up better than I did for him — at least he'd ought to know more about his own life than anyone else. But I had hoped that when he was through he'd hustle around and get some other job being as he didn't like carpentering. But he didn't make any effort to change. He never was much of a boy to get out and get work for

himself. He seemed to lack that quality that the big business men who write for the magazines call initiative. I always kind of wished that he'd have it so as to get a lot of money and fame for himself, but then if he didn't have it he couldn't hardly be blamed. Any number of people don't have it, and if he was one of them why he was. I gave him a job and just sort of let things take their course. I've noticed that they just about do that anyway so I never oppose them much.

He worked with me two or three months, till he'd made a little, and then quit. He told me that he was going to one evening when we were eating supper together in the kitchen.

"I'm going to write," he said right sudden-like.

"Write!" I said, lifting a fried egg across to my plate. "Who to?"

"I mean I'm going to write books, to stay at home and do it. I'll cook for you so as to keep things going here and work with my poetry the rest of the time."

I looked at him for a full moment, setting across from me, thin-like and quiet, and hardly eating anything, like his mother used to do only more so.

"Well, it's probably a good thing to do," I said. "I don't understand much about the writings in books myself and the chances are I never will but then lots of people do and it's all right for them."

So he started in. He bought a cheap typewriter with part of the money he'd made working for me, and settled right down in an old blue shirt to run it. He was at it almost day and night, except what time he was cooking for me. Did he write in this room? Yes, right here at this little table that I made for him when he was starting to school the first time so he'd have something to study on. It's made of cypress and was painted red but the paint's about worn off now, it's been so many years ago. The men up at the university want it bad but I'm not go-

ing to let them have it till I get through with it. If it's worth anything to them they can wait that long at least. No, I haven't got the typewriter here. They wanted something of his so I let them have that. It was a rickety old machine anyway; I used to think it was going to fall to pieces every time he wrote on it but it didn't. He even wrote all my letters for me with it so I guess he got his money's worth even if it was almost worn out when he bought it.

He'd use this chair. He seemed to like it better than any of the others in the house. And he always had his table up to this window where he could watch the people pass by, and see way off across the country. There he'd set and work by the hour making different copies of his stuff. The neighbors seeing him doing it looked sort of funny at it of course, thinking him about half crazy. But I let them look. I've at least got a good boy even if he doesn't set the world a-fire making money, I thought, and that's more than most of them have got.

Sometimes I read what he was writing. But I couldn't understand it much better than I could other men's writing, even if he was my own son. He tried to symbolize in his poetry, he explained to me, and to be a great philosopher as a man named Coleridge said a man had to be to be a successful poet.

"It sounds like the correct way," I told him once, "but you'll have to explain it all to me. You know, son, I've never been to college."

"I can never explain it, dad," he said, and I knew that he couldn't.

I stopped reading it. If the man writing it couldn't tell how it worked, I argued to myself, how could anyone else be expected to tell anything about it. But I never said anything like that to Joey. He understood it deep down in him, I knew, but was just like myself, couldn't find words to explain anything very well.

And the writing was good, I could tell, for a young fellow Joey had met in college told me so. I never knew about this man being in existence even, till I came home from work one evening and found him helping with the supper. Joey introduced him to me as his friend, Mr. So and So, I forgot the name now, who had come to visit us for a week. I welcomed him as best I could, and soon got acquainted with him. He was right sociable, and liked to smoke the same as I did. He had some mighty good cigars along with him that he had bought in Chicago where he lived. Though I didn't know it at the time I found out later that he was a rich man's son there, and was quite an important man himself, writing for magazines and having his name in "Who's Who". He didn't wear very good clothes, though, except that he had a funny way of wearing his coat a lot in the daytime, and was common enough.

I could talk with him better than any man I've ever known. He told me that he had met Joey in college — he was a graduate of the state university, himself — and had tried almost a year before he was able to break the ice enough to get to be a good friend to the boy. And he let me on to a great many other things about him, how he used to spend his time in school reading in the library when it was time for him to be at class, and how he wandered about the streets studying the people's faces instead of studying his books, and how he didn't say much anywhere.

"Mr. Albion," the Chicago fellow said to me one evening when Joey was gone down town to buy some bread for my dinner basket the next day, "do you realize what a great son you have?"

"There'll never be another like him as far as I'm concerned," I answered.

"Joe will be a long time coming into his own," the young man said, "but when he does get there he'll stand

on a plane with the greatest men of all times, even those in the Bible."

I couldn't hardly believe that, of course, about any man living in Carter even if he was my own son, and especially the last part about the Bible men when Joey had never been much of a church goer, but then I knew it wasn't missing the nail very far.

I did really get something important out of the Chicago fellow, though. I found out why my boy was like he was. It was just by accident that I happened to hear the two talking about some poetry Joey had sent off to New York to get printed in a book.

"I knew they'd turn it down," he said. "It wouldn't please the public."

"They'll be glad to get it someday," his friend answered.

"I'm glad they didn't accept it," Joey went on. "I'm surprised that I even wrote it down on paper."

"You had to! It was in you and it had to come out!"

"Yes, I had to!"

In that instant I sort of had a revelation about the boy. He had been lonely, I saw, yes sir, just plain lonely. He hadn't never been much of a mixer and very few people had pulled him into friendship. He had had to pour himself out in writing. And it was partly my own fault, I realized, for I had worked all the time instead of getting next to my boy as lots of fathers do through swimming and baseball and things like that.

It was too late then for me to start in, I could see that. He had grown beyond me and any need of me. The only thing left to do was to find him another companion. It was time for him to get married, I finally decided. A married man always has something to work for. But getting him married, I knew, would be like the mice trying to tie the bell on the cat's neck, it would be next to impossible unless the good Lord was willing. For Joey never cared anything for the girls.

"Somehow I can't get interested in them," he said to me once. "They're so simple!"

"What's the matter, son? Are you bashful?" I asked him.

"No, hardly," he answered, laughing.

To solve the problem I let him go on writing. He's young yet, I thought, and if I just let everything alone the chances are it will work itself out in due time. I never believe in parents interfering much in their children's marriage affairs, anyway. Generally neither age understands the other and the whole thing ends up in a fight sooner or later.

By this time the Chicago fellow had gone home. It was just a little while afterwards that Joey's grandparents in Iowa died, within a week of one another, of some kind of an epidemic that was sweeping through the country. Their going changed the whole course of affairs. They had grown close-fisted during the last few years of their life, and hadn't done anything for the boy like they had when he was little. He had sort of drawn away from them. But when they came to die they sent for him, and left everything to him, which was a fortune for a person living in Carter.

Joey was rich while his old daddy was as poor as ever. He came to me and offered it all to me, but I wouldn't touch it, naturally.

"You'll need it, maybe," he said. "I'm young and I don't need it."

"You'll think different about that some day," I told him.

He saw that I wouldn't take it and left off urging me. He went right on to Iowa the same day, to where his property was — he was of age by that time and didn't have to have a guardian or anything like that. While he was there I never heard much from him. He never was much of a hand to write. It didn't make much difference,

I figured, for I knew he'd take care of himself just as he had done in school. The only thing certain I found out was that he sold his granddaddy's land. And I saw that in the county paper. The money he got was a big amount; the part that he didn't get rid of while he was away went to build and equip a library here in Carter. It is the Bedford limestone building back among the trees, down the road here a piece. The word JOEY was carved over the door at the request of the people here in town.

Yes, he came back. It was one day in the middle of the week, as I was working with two of my older men putting joists in a big building that was going to be used as an Oddfellow's hall. We were going at it slowly, in the kind of eternal way that all carpenters have of moving on.

The boy appeared behind us.

"Joey!" I exclaimed.

The two men working with me got up and went to him too. He had on his old work clothes, overalls and a blue shirt.

"Have you got any tools around?" he said. "I want to go back to work."

He started in right there and helped me faithfully to the end. He was killed as you already know, in an automobile accident. Two cars racing through town caught him as he was crossing the road here in front of the house, reading a letter that he had just got at the Post Office. It was an acceptance of his poetry from the New York publishing company.

As I said before he never liked to work with me. But I believe that he was learning to, right at the last. For just the day before he died he said to a traveling man who remarked that a college man hadn't ought to be wasting his time carpentering around here, "Sir, it is my father's business, and he is the greatest man that I know anything about."

THE MIDLAND LIBRARY

EDITOR'S NOTE. — This department, included in the original plan of THE MIDLAND, was suspended at the end of the third volume. It will present each month one or more critical articles and a number of shorter reviews, written by members of the editorial staff.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BELONGING TO THE HUMAN RACE

A Review of *Arlie Gelston*

By FRANK LUTHER MOTT

Again and again the reader of contemporary fiction finds himself asking, "What's the use?" He finds the characters unadmirable, the milieu ugly, the narrative depressing, the moral tone questionable or worse. Why put them into a book? Are people important who have no souls — or at best only very thin souls?

Now this last question is a very crucial one for the realists, and it must be answered in the affirmative. Arlie Gelston, whose soul is very attenuated indeed, and all Arlie's ilk, are important to all human beings who read and think. They are important first because they also are human beings, and second because they play a considerable part in society. If, however, you belong to that very large class of readers who prefer their sociology and their fiction, their thought and their *belles lettres*, in separate compartments — if, in other words, you turn to fiction merely as an escape from more exacting pursuits and a "sublimation" of your desires — then you have no use for any of the modern realism. It does not belong to you. It belongs rather to those who find in it two things: first, some satisfaction of an insatiable curiosity about human life, which is based not upon morbid-

ity, mark you, but upon love of human kind; and second, that katharsis which Aristotle found in all tragedy — purification through pity. But, contemners of Arlie will say, how can one love human kind in the person of such a poor specimen of it, or pity so despicable a creature? The characters in a Greek tragedy, they will remind us, were noble. To which the patient realist makes answer: there is nobility in mere humanity, always and everywhere. And unless one deeply sympathizes with that central tenet of the realist's creed, he must always remain an incurable romanticist.

Yes, there is nobility in mere humanity. It may not be amiss to repeat once more that old transcendental doctrine. Poor Arlie, though her life was squalid and she cuts a poor figure as a heroine, is, after all, important. As usual, Emerson says it best: "Every occupation, trade, art, transaction, is a compend of all the world and a correlative of every other. . . . Each one must somehow accommodate the whole man and recite all his destiny." Therefore he says, "the crowd in the street oftener furnishes degradations than angels or redeemers, but they all prove the transparency." And in yet another essay: "That is ever the difference between the wise and the unwise: the latter wonder at what is unusual, the wise man wonders at the usual." There are readers who must have their heroes all compact of fine and beautiful and high qualities; there are others who can "wonder at the usual." "Ah poor Real Life that I love!" exclaims Howells in *Their Wedding Journey*, "Can I make others share the delight I feel in thy foolish and insipid face?" And yet more suggestively he wrote in an *Atlantic* article, "Perhaps it was my sense not only of the quaint, the comic, but of the ever-poetic in the common, that made it dear to me." The "ever-poetic": it is the right word. There is poetry in Arlie's poor life — poetry in its widest and deepest sense — the giving of

form to eternal verity. But if the reader is not satisfied with such innate poetry but wishes it decked out in its proper furbelows, the Lord help him, for Mr. Sergel and his fellows emphatically won't!

Mr. Sergel is careless of our opinion of his heroine, and as a result Arlie, with her thin soul, is about as true a character as one is likely to find in fiction. The setting is an Iowa small town, and the Iowa places are either thinly veiled or not veiled at all. Arlie's home is sordid; her parents have no cultivation whatever and quarrel continually; the light places of her existence are the picture show, the celebrations of the Fourth, and automobile rides with unprincipled young men. At nineteen, Arlie faces motherhood without marriage, and the psychic and biologic history of her period of pregnancy and her delivery is a remarkable thing. Arlie's two marriages and her final rejection of an opportunity for infidelity complete the action of the book.

Sounds sordid enough, doesn't it? And possibly tempting to the pruriently minded; therefore I hasten to add that there is nothing here that can be called voluptuous, and that unless fairly plain speaking about certain common facts of life, or, indeed, the very narration of a sex history, be corrupting, there is nothing of corruption in this book. In other words, unless the mind of the reader is very prurient, he will find nothing suggestive in *Arlie Gelston*. Moreover, in *Arlie Gelston*, the moral teaching, although it is absolutely incidental (in accordance with realistic practice), is absolutely sound (in accordance with life): Arlie's sex-dominated life is a failure and in the end fags out to a grey waste in which she cannot care for her new lover or her husband or her son.

It is true, the present reviewer believes, that we have too many sex-centered novels, just as we have too many sex-centered individuals like Arlie Gelston. Too much is made of sex, which is only one of a number of important

businesses of life. One of D. H. Lawrence's characters — a man — says that love is "the be-all and the end-all of life" — and love in the Lawrentian sense is not very spiritual. It was a perfectly terrific lie. Arlie, who never generalized enough to say such a thing, nevertheless practiced the same lie.

It is true, I further believe, that Mr. Sergel is not here a worker in the highest kind of writing. There are those who have room in their hearts for epic, ode and sonnet; for folk-lore, chronicle, essay; for romantic and realistic and all the betwixt and between. Such readers may admit Mr. Sergel to a court where Dickens wears the crown, or Hawthorne, or F. Marion Crawford. But we may permit degree in our allegiance; we may reserve the right to believe that kind of fiction best which deals with richer souls in a richer *milieu*, with people who owe their importance not to mere humanity but to qualities of mind and heart which ally them rather with gods than beasts. Mr. Sergel may disagree; I state the proposition only to show that a critic who subscribes to such a creed finds *Arlie Gelston* an excellent book.

Efforts to convey an idea of its excellence by comparison are likely to be misleading. It has been compared to the work of Theodore Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson, but Sergel is much more a realist than either. He has nothing of Anderson's mysticism, and he portrays women far more truly than Dreiser can. A certain medico-critico-psychologist compares the book with the Parisian *romans populaires* — a suggestion about as inept as possible.

Iowans will say of *Arlie Gelston* what middle westerners all say of *Main Street*: it does not fairly portray the small Iowa town. But Sergel had no obligation to do that, and he does not pretend to do it. With Lewis it was different; his very title, his preface, and his evident intention imposed that duty upon him. Sergel's task is

different; he shows us one human life, which, because it is chiefly physical and almost untouched by imagination or beauty of any kind, comes in contact only with arid things and with other lives as ignoble and soulless as hers. The city is Arlie's natural habitat; accordingly, she leaves Coon Falls behind and misses Chicago only because she happens to meet Mat a little too late. There are far more of her in the apartment houses of Chicago and New York than in Iowa villages. This book does not represent "Iowa really writing of Iowa," as Mr. Anderson has said, but an artist-observer writing of a kind of woman to be found anywhere at any time in the world's history. Sergel uses the Iowa background because he knows it, and what he depicts of it is true as far as it goes. No more need be asked.

Well written, with vitality of diction, marred only occasionally by straining for condensed descriptive phrases or by sentences too complex, *Arlie Gelston* — though a first novel — gives Mr. Sergel an important place among contemporary writers of fiction.

BRIEF REVIEWS

Escapade, by EVELYN SCOTT. (Seltzer, \$3.00). I read *Escapade* rapidly, but attentively and with enjoyment. The book contains many details which for some readers will raise an issue of propriety or of taste. Personally I feel that these details are included by the writer because she finds them necessary if she is to express with adequate vividness what is unquestionably a significant experience; and because of its evident honesty I am ready to accept her decision. To mention this aspect of the book at all is to take space which should be given to some suggestion of its positive virtues: its opulence of really masterly description, its moments of high poetic beauty, its finely positive rhythm of emotion. I shall read *Escapade* again.

J. T. F.

The American Mercury, Volume I, Number 1. Edited by H. L. MENCKEN and GEORGE JEAN NATHAN. (Knopf, \$5.00 per year). The establishment of this magazine seems to me an event of high significance for American letters. Mencken and Nathan have wielded a prodigious influence through their joint editorship of *The Smart Set*. The new organ frees them from certain disadvantages of that magazine, and will make their contribution more definite and more effective. The first issue contains a story by Ruth Suckow which will be especially interesting to readers of THE MIDLAND.

J. T. F.

31 Stories by Thirty and One Authors, edited by ERNEST RHYS and C. A. DAWSON SCOTT. (Appleton, \$2.00). The student of the American short story will find this collection of English short stories well worthy of his consideration. The names of such well-known writers as Galsworthy, Bennett, and Wells contribute authority, although it may be remarked that the stories of Wells and Chesterton are the least effective of the whole collection. Necessary spice for the modern palate is furnished by a satisfying number of casualties: murders, accidental deaths, and suicides. There is not a real laugh in the whole book, for "Fine Feathers" by W. W. Jacobs, the only story that sets out definitely to be funny, falls just a fatal bit short. Ernest Bramah, on the contrary, succeeds admirably in the sly humor of his story of Chang Tao. His volume, *Kai Lung's Golden Hours*, will certainly be worth borrowing from someone. For that matter, so is *31 Stories*.

E. P. F.

The Able McLaughlins. By MARGARET WILSON. (Harper, \$2.00). *The Able McLaughlins* is concerned with pioneer days of a Scottish settlement in Iowa, which is not to be taken as an alibi for the current realism. But in the inoffensive prosecution of her task the author seems to find a need of underlining at times which is also perhaps a consequence of the slightness of her material. Such names as Wully for the hero and Christie McNair for the heroine should not suggest that this is quite the traditional New England community novel of earlier years. For one thing, the story goes right on after their marriage. Sympathy for the material results in a neat if not heroic job, efficiently done.

R. K.

Pens and Pirates. By WILLIAM ARTHUR DEACON. (Toronto: The Ryerson Press. \$2.50.) This is a book of a collected columnist ranging to the familiar essay (which Mr. Deacon calls "a vocal exercise on the *I* vowel"). Probably its chief importance lies in its defining an awakening literary consciousness in Canada. And because he is a pioneer in this neck of the woods the writer is full of the customary enthusiasms of literary pioneers: enthusiasms of positive patriotism and of patriotism converted into warning objurgation. Faith, however, predominates, and sound sense, exemplified in his remark on free verse, "the great thing to remember about free verse is that it is a form of poetry and not prose gone wrong". But Mr. Deacon does suffer to the full, with others, from the necessity a book has of containing more than forty thousand words before it can be marketed at the usual price per copy.

R. K.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

RAYMOND KNISTER is a young Canadian writer who has contributed stories and poems to earlier issues of THE MIDLAND. His work has also appeared in *The Canadian Forum*, *The Canadian Bookman*, and other magazines. He is at present in Iowa City, writing and serving as assistant editor of THE MIDLAND.

LEONARD LANSON CLINE is the author of poems previously published in THE MIDLAND, and of stories and poems in other magazines. He contributes "Sweeney's Grail", an ironical study of policemen, to the first issue of *The American Mercury*. He is a member of the editorial staff of the *New York World*.

RAYMOND WEEKS is known to readers of THE MIDLAND as the author of the story "Arkansas" in the last volume, and of other sketches of the region and period portrayed in "The Bucking Palfrey". He is also the author of "Ode to France" (Oxford University Press, New York, 1917) and of short stories and poems in various magazines. An article of interest to poets appeared in *Scribner's* for September, 1923, under the title "The Poets and Nature".

WARREN L. VAN DINE is a young writer now living at Burnside, Hancock County, Illinois. "The Poet" is his first published story.

THE EDITOR'S PAGE

ARLIE GELSTON

I am especially glad to publish in this issue Frank Luther Mott's review of *Arlie Gelston*. Mr. Sergel's novel is one which is estimated very differently by different critics, and one which I personally estimate very highly indeed. I had intended to review it myself. But I realized that my friendship with Mr. Sergel and our association in the work of *THE MIDLAND* during past years might make my opinion seem prejudiced. Mr. Mott's judgment is free from the possibility of any such imputation; and furthermore it seems to me that he has given all of us — even Mr. Sergel — something worth thinking about. I am fully content merely to add an enthusiastic "Hear! Hear!" to his praise of *Arlie Gelston*.

THE TENTH VOLUME

I have considered various ways of celebrating *THE MIDLAND*'s tenth birthday. There is something about entering upon the last year of the decade which seems a bit noteworthy, especially in view of the high infant mortality among such American magazines as are neither commercial nor endowed. Probably not many of those who knew *THE MIDLAND* in its earlier years expected to see it reach a tenth volume; surely no actuary of magazinedom would have considered *THE MIDLAND* a good risk.

Yet here we are. And though there is no virtue in mere longevity, to be sure, I am glad that there can be a tenth volume, grateful to the subscribers and contributors who make it possible, and hopeful that this volume may be better than those which have preceded it. *THE MIDLAND* for 1924 is a larger magazine than it has been before, numbering in its company more writers and more readers. Yet in spite of its growth, and its attainment of an age which the hazards of its existence make almost venerable, I find that I cannot think of it as really different in any way from *THE MIDLAND* of the past. It is still to me a joint adventure of readers, contributors, and editor — laborious and difficult but joyous, slightly irresponsible, and devoted most of all to the cause of good fellowship. We are seeking, to be sure, some such things as truth and beauty. But I do not want to be too rigidly convinced that I know what these things are or where to find them. Nor can I tell how long we may journey together. I am content if in this tenth volume we of *THE MIDLAND*, new friends and old, may find something pleasant in our comradeship, and something to be cherished in our freedom.

